CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A system for utilizing a collective processing capability of a plurality of computers after the computers have been sold to purchasers by a vendor, the system comprising the steps of:

entering into a plurality of agreements, each of which is between the vendor and a different one of the purchasers, wherein, with respect to a specific one of the computers to be sold to said one of the purchasers, the vendor retains a right to use said specific one after the sale thereof;

conveying, subject to said agreements, the plurality of the computers to said purchasers;

interconnecting the computers via the Internet to create a network; and

using the network to provide a service that provides the vendor with a commercial benefit.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein each one of said plurality of agreements is entered into prior to the sale of a respective said specific one of the computers via the network.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the agreement provides a purchasing incentive to each of the purchasers.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein, in response to a query generated by a first one of the computers and received by a second one of the computers, data is sent from the second one of the computers to the first one of the computers.

5. The system of claim 4, wherein said data comprises an Internet web page.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the network comprises a plurality of nodes, each of which includes one of the computers, and wherein one of the nodes is a vendor node; and

wherein the vendor node maintains a list of all of the computers connected thereto, along with the respective IP addresses for each of the

computers, and information identifying files stored on each respective one of the computers.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the network comprises a plurality of peers, each of which includes one of the computers; and

wherein each of the peers in the network is a servent that acts as both a client and a server to distribute data between the peers in response to a query generated by one of the peers.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein:

said query is distributed between successive said peers until the query is received by one of the peers having access to said data; and

said data is distributed between successive said peers until the data is received by said one of the peers that generated the query.

9. The system of claim 1, wherein said network includes said computers used by entities not in privity with the vendor.

10. The system of claim 1, wherein the right to use said specific one of the computers includes the right to use low-priority processor cycles of the specific one of the computers to effect said service.

11. The system of claim 1, wherein the right to use said specific one of the computers includes the right to use a predetermined amount of processor time of the specific one of the computers to effect said service, within a fixed interval of time.

12. The system of claim 1, wherein the network is used to provide said service after a predetermined minimum number of the computers have been conveyed to the purchasers.

13. The system of claim 1, wherein said computers include devices having an embedded processor.

14. A system for utilizing a collective processing capability of a plurality of devices containing embedded processors, after the devices have been sold to purchasers by a vendor, the system comprising the steps of:

entering into an agreement between the vendor and one of the purchasers wherein, with respect to a specific one of the devices to be sold to said one of the purchasers, the vendor retains a right to use said specific one after the sale thereof;

conveying at least one of the devices to a purchaser, after entering into said agreement; and

repeating the previous two steps until a predetermined minimum number of said devices have been sold.

15. The system of claim 14, including the additional steps of:

interconnecting the devices via the Internet to create a network; and

using the network to provide a service, used by the purchasers, that provides the vendor with a commercial benefit.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein, in response to a query generated by a first one of the devices and received by a second one of the devices, data is sent from the second one of the devices to the first one of the devices via the network.

17. The system of claim 15, wherein the network comprises a plurality of nodes, each of which includes one of the devices, and wherein one of the nodes is a vendor node; and

wherein the vendor node maintains a list of all of the devices connected thereto, along with the respective IP addresses for each of the devices, and information identifying files accessible by each respective one of the devices.

18. The system of claim 15, wherein the network comprises a plurality of peers, each of which includes one of the devices; and

wherein each of the peers in the network is a servent that acts as both a client and a server to distribute data between the peers in response to a query generated by one of the peers.

19. The system of claim 14, wherein the right to use said specific one of the devices includes the right to use low-priority processor cycles of the specific one of the devices to effect said service.

20. The system of claim 14, wherein the right to use said specific one of the devices includes the right to use a predetermined amount of processor time of the specific one of the devices to effect said service, within a fixed interval of time.

21. A system for utilizing a collective processing capability of a plurality of computers comprising the steps of:

(a) entering into an agreement between a vendor of said computers and a purchaser of one of the computers, wherein the vendor retains a right to use the computer after the sale thereof;

(b) conveying said one of the computers to said purchaser, after entering into said agreement;

wherein steps (a) and (b) are repeated with a different said purchaser until a predetermined minimum number of the computers have been sold; and

(c) interconnecting the devices via the Internet to create a network.

22. The system of claim 21, including the additional step of using the network to provide a service.

23. The system of claim 22, wherein, in response to a query generated by a first one of the computers and received by a second one of the computers, data is sent from the second one of the computers to the first one of the computers via the network.

24. The system of claim 22, wherein the network comprises a plurality of nodes, each of which includes one of the computers, and wherein one of the nodes is a vendor node; and

wherein the vendor node maintains a list of all of the computers connected thereto, along with the respective IP addresses for each of the computers, and information identifying files stored on each respective one of the computers.

25. The system of claim 22, wherein the network comprises a plurality of peers, each of which includes one of the computers; and

wherein each of the peers in the network is a servent that acts as both a client and a server to distribute data between the peers in response to a query generated by one of the peers.